



## Book Reviews

### *Office Hours: Activism and Change in the Academy*

by Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt

Routledge, 2004

Reviewed by Daniel Schierenbeck

One of the most frustrating aspects of the ongoing crisis in higher education—particularly in the humanities—is the sense of its inevitability. When graduate students and faculty members examine the state of the job market, the growth of contingent labor, or the decreased public funding of higher education, it becomes easy for them to throw their hands up in despair. Furthermore, it is especially tempting for those on the tenure track to ignore these issues and to concentrate on furthering their own survival and professional advancement. *Office Hours* is precisely the right sort of remedy to counteract such attitudes. In this collection of essays, dedicated activists Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt trace the roots of the crises that higher education now faces, but they also offer specific models for change. Part One, “Where We Are and How We Got There,” provides a trenchant analysis of the current state of higher education; Part Two, “Toward Alternative Futures,” offers instructive case studies that show how different forms of collective action are able to deal with issues that are currently vexing academia as well as those that loom on the horizon. Perhaps the most refreshing and honest aspect of this collection is its unflinching focus on how much of this crisis can be blamed on “faculty passivity” (vii). Instead of looking at only those ominous forces outside the profession, Watt and Nelson “place a significant blame on the professoriate itself” (vii). Indeed, this sort of critique may make faculty the most uncomfortable, but that is precisely why it is necessary, for such honesty is needed to stimulate collective action. The authors’ solutions thus provide realistic hope because these remedies are focused on what members of the profession can do for themselves. Moreover, since the essays emphasize “the need for collective action on every front” (vii), individuals need not feel they are working in a vacuum against impossible odds; rather, Watt and Nelson’s solutions would help

reinvigorate a sense of community among faculty, the erosion of which is one of the outcomes of the corporate model of the university.

In the first essay, “Cohorts—The Diaspora of the Teachers,” Nelson recounts the various career paths of graduate school cohorts and of his class of assistant professors at the University of Illinois. These specific stories illuminate the longstanding nature of many current problems. As Nelson argues, “We believe we cannot master the forces operating on our present and shaping our future unless we confront our past” (25). The keystone of this essay, which reverberates throughout the collection, is Nelson’s exposure of the “parallel tracks” in the English profession. By bringing together these two different tracks, Nelson is able to reveal the “long-standing blindnesses” (24) of a profession that celebrates theory but refuses to theorize its own institutional practices, a profession that has progressive ideals but does not apply them to its own workplace. More pointedly, he shows that by buying into the entrepreneurial model of academia, faculty members have ceded “community responsibility and collective action” to “individual ambition” (26). The conclusion of this key essay summarizes the overall message of the book: “Mourn *and* organize” (26).

This lack of self-reflexivity in the profession is further examined in chapter 2, which features a brief survey of recent publications on the humanities. Specifically, Nelson argues that the rise of the “entrepreneurial faculty member” has fostered “disciplinary identities that are primarily self-interested” (33). For Nelson, a “true disciplinary identity would make faculty quite concerned with the exploitation of contingent teachers” because of its effects of the discipline, and he calls for “a new breed of citizen scholars who can identify not only with institution and discipline but also with

community” (37).

This model of a citizen scholar is further defined through specific cases in chapters 7 through 9 of Part Two. For example, in “Organizational Affiliation and Change,” Nelson addresses the issue of professional identity by contending that “affiliation needs to be reconceived” to resist further exploitation the academic workplace (116). By weaving his personal experiences with organizations such as the MLA and AAUP together with his efforts in organizing local campuses, Nelson reveals the positive change that multiple affiliation can bring and points out how activism brings about an “intense scrutiny” (99) of one’s own position in the profession. He also advocates reforming organizations such as the MLA and the AAUP. Watt’s chapter, “Is It a University or Is It a Country Club?” also focuses on positive outcomes that can result when faculty are committed to their institutions. Watt describes the combined efforts of faculty, students, and community in successfully opposing the building of new golf course on university-owned land near the Indiana University campus. The ability of collective action to quash a project that evidenced “the university’s . . . indifference to the public that supports it” (120) provides a sober lesson about how universities’ worst tendencies need to be checked by those with the most at stake in the university and its mission. This same lesson is emphasized in the Syracuse University service employee strike of 1998, which is detailed in chapter 9. Indeed, the hero of this strike is a “collective hero,” since the faculty worked together with students and striking workers. However, Nelson and Watt also use the example of the University of Cincinnati to demonstrate why solidarity “needs to be reinvigorated and renewed” (160). The combined lesson of all these chapters is not that we give up our own research and disciplinary commitments, but that “we add identities to those in which we already invested” and “make time . . . for more collective action” (163), so that we are able to preserve the ability to pursue those research and teaching commitments that renew our profession.

Nelson and Watt also treat two highly visible issues in the profession: the training of graduate students and the structure of the job market. In “Disciplining Debt,” Watt studies an

aspect of graduate education that is less familiar to the professoriate and, for that reason, integral to a realistic understanding of the present state of higher education. Watt outlines the troubling numbers about graduate student debt as well as delineating how this problem developed. In particular, he shows how debt is related to discipline, with fine arts and humanities students in far worse shape than those in the sciences. He also cites factors ranging from the minimum-wage salaries of graduate employees to the emphasis on pre-professionalization to the efficiency of graduate programs in general. In addition to raising awareness of these problems, Watt also outlines necessary changes at the department, institutional, and national levels. In chapter 12, Watt continues his analysis of graduate education. He deals especially with recent discussions about how to such graduate education more efficient, especially by minimizing research and emphasizing pedagogy. Watt argues that before we can consider what to add or delete from current programs, we need to formulate ethical principles that will be the basis for any changes. For example, though abolishing the dissertation may improve time to graduation and reduce debt, Watt sees such a move as placing “basic principles” of the profession “in jeopardy,” for it will only feed the idea that research is not essential to the humanities (194). His specific suggestions include removing the qualifying examination, considering the dissertation as a series of articles, and informing new students about placement rates and the dangers of debt. Guiding all his considerations, though, is the overarching point of this book: that “labor . . . must be moved to the center of our considerations” (210).

Connected to this discussion is chapter 3, which demonstrates the positive and negative consequences that derive from establishing a postdoc program. Nelson here shows how the progressive activism that led to a postdoc program at the University of Illinois yielded unintended consequences. This program, which stemmed from the desire to be more responsible toward Ph.D. recipients, eventually caused greater possibilities for contract and part-time appointments. The lesson here applies as well to a national postdoc program, and Nelson demonstrates the exploitation of cheap labor that

could arise from such a system. These chapters clearly reveal there are no quick fixes for the problems in graduate education and the job market, and, in doing so, they prompt deeper thought about how these problems are interrelated with labor issues throughout the academy which need to be faced head on.

Besides dealing with the more familiar problem areas of higher education, Nelson and Watt also discuss important issues that may not be on the radar of most in academia. For example, in chapter 5, Nelson outlines the dangers of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) especially since they are beginning “to review social sciences and humanities research more widely than ever before” (71). Furthermore, the supervision of IRBs can shift control of research and pedagogy from faculty members to bureaucrats. Thus, IRBs can have drastic consequences for free speech and academic freedom, as Nelson’s case study demonstrates. In the next chapter, Nelson explores how the actions of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization demolish humanities education in favor of global economic expansion. He warns in particular against the shift toward “the instrumentalized international model of education”—a focus on “lifelong learning” as constant “job training and retraining” (83)—that these entities encourage throughout the world. Nelson goes on to celebrate the tradition of scholarship and inquiry that flourished from the 1960s to 1980s but also mourns its loss, citing the 90 percent decline in book sales from the 1970s to 1990s. He is particularly concerned that with “the rise of the World Bank culture . . . we may not be able to do this interpretive work for the newly recovered work of the Left” (91). This problem stems from lack of support and time for part-timers, the collapse of the publishing market, and the shift toward instrumental curricula. He concludes this chapter by noting grimly: “What is very clear is that we cannot proceed without talking very seriously about the global interdependence of our intellectual and economic futures. For we cannot continue to expand the canon with a cannon aimed at our heads” (93).

In Part Two, Nelson demonstrates how these global forces impinge on research and publishing and how such forces may be resisted.

In “The Economics of Textbook Reform,” Nelson’s description of creating an anthology of modern American poetry clearly shows how “a major anthology is as much a financial project as a cultural one” (170). Especially because of the high price of reprint fees, larger, commercial publisher are increasingly becoming the only entities that can afford to take on anthologies. The lessons from Nelson’s work clearly demonstrate the necessity of anthologies to keep texts alive (or to bring them back to life) as well the difficulty of creating such anthologies. His next chapter, though, offers ways to address these problems through the Internet. He points to MAPS, a website that began as a companion to his anthology but has evolved into a much more elaborate resource which includes scholarship that benefits students and teachers around the world. Since MAPS includes a large number of noncanonical poets, this effort helps to counteract the difficulties in expanding the canon through traditional publishing. A practical resource to those in the discipline, this site also provides the valuable function of “demonstrating the value of scholarship to members of the general public” (186). Of course, such a project like this requires funding, which universities are not inclined to provide. Still, even on a smaller scale the idea behind such a project can offer a “democratizing and liberating” (187) effect, not just to students but to faculty and the general public.

In his essay on MAPS, Nelson does broach the question of how those in the humanities can demonstrate their worth to the public. This issue seems to be quite relevant in a time when state support for higher education continues to decline, but Nelson and Watt do not explicitly emphasize this topic in their collection. Furthermore, since they are deriving their lessons from their own experiences, they deal primarily with how problems of academic labor evidence themselves in Research I institutions. Their earnest call for faculty to re-examine themselves and to reform their profession and its labor practices, though, clearly can be applied to institutions across the board. Moreover, a profession that re-examines its own practices within and commitments to its institutions and disciplines will be better positioned to argue its case to the general public and to connect with that public through collective action. For those

concerned about the current state of academia, and even more so for those who are not, *Office Hours* offers a necessary and sobering wake-up call that will lead to self-examination and, one

hopes, toward collective action.

***Teamsters and Turtles? U.S. Progressive Political Movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

**edited by John C. Berg**  
Rowman & Littlefield, 2003

Reviewed by Gregory W. Streich

For anyone interested in the state of progressive political movements, *Teamsters and Turtles? U.S. Progressive Political Movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* serves as a helpful overview. As the question mark in the title suggests, there is not always an easy alliance among various progressive political movements. On one side are dockworkers, autoworkers, loggers, and others, who are concerned about protecting their wages and jobs, but who are seen as willing to protect those jobs at the expense of the environment. On the other side are environmentalists who want to protect old-growth forests, habitats, and various animal species, but who are seen as unconcerned with what that means for workers. This too often creates what John C. Berg refers to as a “jobs versus owls” conflict (11) that undermines a broader progressive coalition. How to get beyond this contradiction—and indeed whether it can be resolved—both in theory and in practice is the focus of the book.

As Berg notes, the chapters in *Teamsters and Turtles?* are written with the hope that activists engaged in social movements, as well as the academics who study (and sometimes participate in) them, can guide us toward a politics of coalition and away from a politics of factionalism without subsuming multiple struggles under one dominant narrative. Berg suggests that a turning point may have been the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999, which brought together progressive activists of all kinds and concerns in Seattle, Washington. While Berg sees the anti-WTO protest as a starting point for more progressive coalition-building, such optimism is

not shared by all the contributing authors. Indeed, one only has to read until page 54 to hear Immanuel Ness (in the chapter “Unions and American Workers: Whither the Labor Movement?”) strike a more pessimistic tone. Writing at the point that the International Brotherhood of Teamsters supported a bill that would open up the Arctic National Wildlife Preserve for oil drilling, Ness states that “two years after the much-ballyhooed teamster-turtle, labor-environmental alliance at the WTO protests in Seattle, parochial trade union interests seem to have won out, revealing the alliance as little more than media spectacle and wishful thinking on the part of leftists seeking to build a broader social movement” (54).

The question asked in the book’s title remains very much an open one: is it possible to bring together divergent progressive political movements around a core agenda, or will the left continue to be weakened by internal bickering, factionalism, and contradictions? Is there a core agenda around which to organize, and if so, what does it look like? And lastly, does the desire for a core agenda potentially squash the very diversity of identities, goals, and tactics that many on the left value? Berg’s *Teamsters and Turtles?* raises these questions, but does not come to any definitive answers (and thus may disappoint a reader looking for concrete suggestions and a blueprint for action).

Berg’s introductory chapter offers an interesting discussion of several themes. First, he considers how social movements are defined, discusses various social movement theories, and distinguishes social movements from interest groups. Second, he nicely summarizes an

intricate debate about how to define the terms “progressive” and “left” as well as why the former was used in the title rather than the latter. And third, he lays out the Achilles’ heel of the “left” by analyzing why it often succumbs to internal debates about what is the most fundamental conflict that merits our primary attention. According to Berg,

The movements discussed in this book are united, first of all, by the sense that they have a common enemy. They are less united about how that enemy should be defined—“capitalism,” “the corporations,” “imperialism,” or “the power structure,” for example—but they have more or less the same social forces in mind, whatever the term. However, some movements would add other forces—“patriarchy,” “white supremacy,” “compulsory heterosexuality,” for example—that refer to something different. For a long time this potential problem was handled through the language of primary and secondary contradictions. The idea was that everyone should unite around the primary contradiction, generally seen as that between capitalists and workers; meanwhile, various secondary contradictions—between men and women, white and black, able-bodied and disabled, as examples—should be resolved in order to preserve unity. (10)

Berg suggests that the very search for a primary contradiction has produced tensions that undermine a broader progressive movement, particularly since we lack universal agreement on what that primary contradiction is, and any ostensibly universal contradiction will only serve to marginalize those who disagree. The implication, then, is that progressives can move forward on a variety of issues (e.g. the environment, peace, workers’ rights, gender equity, etc.) if we (a) recognize that each movement is attacking a piece of a larger puzzle, and/or (b) recognize that these are overlapping and mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive, issues. This won’t eliminate all of the debate and tension—since there will remain some theoretical purists who will balk at adopting such a pragmatic approach—but Berg hopes it will move us away from self-defeating theoretical infighting.

Berg also offers a useful discussion of Ronald Inglehart’s theory of culture shift (which is also examined in many of the chapters). To briefly summarize, Inglehart hypothesizes that in the industrialized democracies of Western Europe and the U.S., the politics of materialism (in which individuals and social groups focus primarily on economic security and class issues) will give way to the politics of postmaterialism (once economic security and affluence is achieved, then individuals and groups will primarily focus on identity, environmental, and other quality of life issues). Berg nicely reminds us that economic security and affluence fluctuate and are never guaranteed (witness the trends toward downsizing, outsourcing, stagnating wages, union busting, and increasing polarization of wealth over the past thirty years); thus, material concerns will continue to be a focal point for some individuals and groups even in an era supposedly defined by postmaterial values. Also, Berg reminds us that material and postmaterial movements often overlap, when he observes that “the disabled have material interests, and industrial workers desire recognition” (13).

While Berg recognizes that the material/postmaterial distinction is in many ways an untenable false dichotomy, for the sake of convenience he uses it to organize the book. Each chapter examines one movement in general, and focuses on one specific organization in that broader movement (e.g. the peace movement is analyzed with attention given to Voices in the Wilderness; the human rights movement is analyzed with attention given to Human Rights Watch; the anti-globalization movement is analyzed with attention given to Global Exchange, etc.). This formula works well to summarize the state of each movement, and to examine a specific organization as a “case study” that enables the authors to discuss social movement theory as well as the practical goals, tactics, successes, and failures of each movement organization.

The introduction section includes Berg’s overview chapter and another by Ronald Hayduk that nicely surveys the emergence of the anti-globalization movement in general and the strategies of Global Exchange in particular. Hayduk’s chapter, “From Anti-Globalization to

Global Justice: A Twenty-First-Century Movement,” examines how the anti-globalization movement is shifting from a reactive critique of globalization and its undemocratic and anti-environmental consequences toward a global justice movement that offers positive alternatives such as Fair Trade cooperative agreements that can democratize globalization.

The remainder of the book comprises nine chapters arranged in three parts, each containing three chapters. Part I focuses on movements based on material needs. The chapter by Immanuel Ness (“Unions and American Workers: Whither the Labor Movement?”) nicely discusses the general decline of union strength in the U.S., as well as the tension between the corporatist strategies of the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters and the more progressive strategies of unions such as the Service Employees International Union. Laura Katz Olson and Frank L. Davis’ chapter (“Mass-Membership Senior Interest Groups and the Politics of Aging”) offers interesting insights into how the electoral strength of groups such as the AARP are outweighed by the lobbying strength of the interest groups representing the medical and insurance industries. However, this chapter didn’t seem to fit very well in the volume given its emphasis on interest groups and electoral strategies. Finally, Christine Kelly and Joel Lefkowitz’s chapter (“Radical and Pragmatic: United Students against Sweatshops”) is a very interesting analysis of the strategies, goals, and successes of the student anti-sweatshop movement that is spreading across U.S. universities and colleges by bringing pressure to bear on university administrators to divest from, and demand changes in, companies that produce college apparel with exploited labor.

Part II focuses on movements based on postmaterialist identities. Melissa Haussman’s chapter (“From Women’s Survival to New Directions: WAND and Anti-Militarism”) examines how the Women’s Party for Survival, which formed in 1980 based on the charismatic leadership of Dr. Helen Caldicott and focused on anti-nuclear weapons proliferation, evolved in 1990 into Women’s Action for New Directions (WAND). The latter is a more professionalized

organization with a multifaceted agenda, which includes efforts to thwart nuclear proliferation and support women candidates running for state and national offices. Benjamin Shepard’s chapter (“The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: A Brief Reconsideration”) chronicles the origin and development of ACT UP. Shepard shows how ACT UP originally focused on domestic issues such as rights, access to health care, and queer identity but has expanded its focus to include global issues such as supporting South Africa’s effort to provide cheaper anti-AIDS/HIV medications over the objection of the big pharmaceutical manufacturers. And David Pfeiffer’s chapter (“The Disability Movement: Ubiquitous but Unknown”) is an insider’s account of the history, evolution, multiple tactics, and multiple goals of the disability movement in the U.S. Pfeiffer critiques the implicit meanings of the term “disabled” while focusing on various groups that are active on issues ranging from strengthening the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to mobilizing against euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Part III focuses on altruistic movements. The chapter co-authored by James R. and Solon J. Simmons (“Growing Green: Can It Happen Here?”) assesses the likelihood of a Green Party gaining some influence in the U.S. Using public opinion surveys and a content analysis of the political parties in the election of 2000, the authors conclude that without proportional representation a Green Party will have minimal national impact. Further, given their analysis of survey research, they predict that an environmental crisis is more likely to spur a right-wing populism rather than a progressive alternative. Reading this chapter while gas and oil prices are skyrocketing and oil companies are making record profits—and while Congress is refusing to mandate higher fuel efficiency standards on domestic manufacturers and is further poised to pass a bill opening the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling—one can’t help but feel that (sadly) this prediction is coming true. Claude E. Welch, Jr.’s chapter (“Human Rights Watch: American Liberal Values in the Global Arena”) examines the 1978 origin of the U.S.-based Helsinki Watch, a non-governmental organization (NGO) focusing on human rights in Eastern Europe, and its 1993

evolution into Human Rights Watch, which has a global mission to investigate and publicize human rights violations around the world. Welch notes that while Human Rights Watch prefers an “insider” strategy that seeks access to officials so it can provide policy recommendations, it also employs an “outsider” strategy by publicizing its findings to engage in the “mobilization of shame” (219) to bring governments into line with international human rights standards. While extremely relevant and interesting, this chapter left me unsure of whether Human Rights Watch, as an NGO, was more of an interest group or a social movement. Perhaps comparing it to Amnesty International, the other prominent organization in the sphere of human rights advocacy, would help clarify this. And finally, Meredith Reid Sarkees (in the chapter “The Peace Movement: Voices in the Wilderness”) gives an overview of the peace movement in the U.S. by comparing the strategies used, and the amount of influence wielded, by various groups ranging from the Council on Foreign Relations to the Nuclear Freeze Campaign. She then uses *Voices in the Wilderness* (ViTW) as a case study of an organization that mobilized opposition to the war in Iraq by using a variety of strategies, including sending members to Iraq to publicize the impact of any invasion on local Iraqi civilians.

Though *Teamsters and Turtles?* is very interesting and informative, it left me with some questions and concerns. First, while I recognize that the book is not a comprehensive catalogue of political movements, it would be stronger if it included a chapter on anti-racism. Such a chapter would help illustrate the problematic material/postmaterial dichotomy, since many organizations in the anti-racism movement address both material issues (unemployment, equity in education, access to health care, etc.) and postmaterial issues (identity, representation, respect, diversity, etc.) Second, given the wide variety of topics covered in the three sections of the book, it would be nice to conclude it with an epilogue written by Berg. Since the chapters did not respond to each other, Berg could have pulled together some common themes and points of overlap between each chapter, and also have raised questions for future research and

consideration. And third, most of the chapters were written for a mini-conference held in 2000, and Berg asked that the authors update their respective essays to consider the ramifications for their political movements of the terrorist attack of 9/11/01 and the Bush administration’s subsequent War on Terror. While some of the authors heeded Berg’s instructions and rightly pointed out that activism in the post-9/11 era would be difficult given the Bush administration’s ritualistic invocation of it to justify all types of radically conservative policy changes and to dismiss critics as unpatriotic, not all of them did. This led to some inconsistency across the chapters.

This inconsistency creates a sense that some of the chapters were already “dated” as the book was published in 2003. When I read *Teamsters and Turtles?* not only had the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to topple the Taliban, but it had invaded Iraq in March of 2003, and various scandals such as the torture and abuse inside prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo Bay—as well as the CIA’s “extraordinary rendition” program—were made public. And as I finish writing this review, there are even more developments that are relevant to the issues and movements discussed in the book, including the installation of Paul Wolfowitz, one of the architects of the invasion of Iraq, as the new head of the World Bank, and Amnesty International’s annual report that lists the U.S. as a major violator of human rights due to incidents such as the abuse of Iraqis in Abu Ghraib. While I cannot expect the book to include discussions of all of these events, the fact that some chapters were not even updated to include references to the invasion of Afghanistan or the use of 9/11 to justify the passage of the Patriot Act leads to that sense of premature datedness. To be fair, while this is a slight criticism of the book as it is written (I hasten to add that I fully recognize that it is not feasible to “hold off” on publishing a book until events run their course and it can be updated to reflect upon them), it is also a wish to read an updated second edition that includes a discussion of the events listed above and an analysis of their implications for various progressive movements.

In conclusion, despite some of my concerns and criticisms, this book and the

concrete movements it considers are not only welcome but needed in our time, given that progressive causes are fighting a well-organized, well-funded, and increasingly strident conservative political movement. Recently, it seems that the most influential political movements in the U.S. have been those on the right, which have been successful in mobilizing, fundraising, electioneering, lobbying, and public relations. Witness the insider and outsider influence of various movement organizations and think tanks such as the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, Project for a New American Century, the Federalist Society, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute, to name just a few. Right-wing political movements and conservative think tanks have been able to coordinate their efforts (despite some significant internal schisms) to capture the White House, increase their majorities in the U.S. House and Senate, increase the number of state legislatures and gubernatorial offices they hold, tighten their grip on the media, stack the courts with strict constructionists, and shift the terms of public debate toward conservative causes masked by code words such as “patriotism” and “common sense.”

Additionally, the strategies of conservative political movements are

increasingly being documented both by insiders (see Richard A. Viguerie’s insider account of the rise of conservatism in *America’s Right Turn: How Conservatives Used New and Alternative Media to Take Power*) and by outside observers and critics (see John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge’s *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* and Christine Kelly’s *Tangled Up in Red, White, and Blue*). Progressives have begun debating how to respond to the rise of conservatism, with many suggesting that the left should mimic the right’s strategy of fundraising, think tanks, media ownership, and grass roots organizing. Recall that Howard Dean, recently elected to lead the DNC, has continually argued that the strategies of right-wing groups such as the Christian Coalition offer useful lessons for progressives and Democrats (and after all, Ralph Reed mobilized the Christian Coalition by studying the successful organizing techniques of the civil rights movement of the 1950s-60s). In short, one hopes that progressives in the U.S. can get their act together, even if it means studying the recent success of right-wing political movements to find models to emulate. While *Teamsters and Turtles?* does not offer a concrete blueprint for progressives to follow, it will prompt us to search for ways to work together across issues that too often tear the left apart from within.

## ***Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education***

**by Joe Berry**

Monthly Review Press, 2005

Reviewed by William Vaughn

The subtitle to Joe Berry’s important new book promises that by organizing we can change higher education, and while I share that hope, I doubt if Berry would agree that the portion of his study which best communicates some shape of that change is the “Acknowledgments.” Maybe I’m the only one who ever reads these pages of an academic tome, but I’ve seen enough instances of the genre to recognize the formula: dissertation directors thanked; colleagues recognized; conference

hosts toasted; journals credited; partners beatified. All praise to those who supposedly made the work possible; all blame to the person whose name actually appears on the spine. There’s nothing really wrong with the formula—every cliché contains some truth—but as a formula, it too often expresses the very structure of labor books like Berry’s are hoping to revise: one person at the top of a pyramid, acknowledging that pyramid, with the pyramid builders then scuttling off to the footnotes and



works cited pages.

Books, then, are often like the institutions that sponsor them: glamorous apogees cresting countless hours of invisible labor—only some of which was performed by the person whose name appears on the spine. Joe Berry has worked on a number of pyramids; he's put in the hours; and he's talked to, consulted with, and learned from a lot of other people who have done the same. Much of which is acknowledged beautifully toward the end of *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower*. If, like he and I, you value such a reclamation project, read the "Acknowledgments" for an alternative perspective on what it means to do the work of education and for how we might begin to change our work.

Should you choose to read the book in its given sequence, though, you will first move through five frames of organizing before reaching the felt sense of such captured in those "Acknowledgments." *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower* opens with some snapshots of contingent academic labor before theorizing bases of response. It then moves to more specific accounts, first of recent organizing successes in Chicago and then—somewhat speculatively—of a metropolitan strategy we might extrapolate there from. The fifth and final chapter concerns some basic organizing advice.

Having shared rostrum, periodical, and anthology space with Joe Berry, I was more than prepared to be impressed with this volume; having organized academic workers at the graduate employee and tenure-line levels, I was ready to learn more about the needs of those in contingent circumstances. Berry's book rewards on multiple levels. Its limitations, I suspect, are those intrinsic to a nascent genre. We are only beginning to organize toward change. The more progress made, the better we will understand both where we've been and where we're going.

One appreciates especially the author's respect for the very contingencies of contingent workers. As Berry recognizes, one of the fundamental questions such workers must ask is, "[W]hat organizational structure in a particular situation will best provide the maximum amount of activism and class consciousness in any particular situation?" (36). I would also endorse the entire section on "Appointment to Union

Staff," which should be read by anyone building or maintaining a union for education workers (41-46). Chapter 3, "The Chicago Experience," grows out of Berry's interview research, and compellingly captures the voices of academic unionists as they progress from disgruntled and disposable employees to reinvigorated professionals. I also found myself concurring when Berry defined a union as "the relationship among people that allows us to trust that we are not alone and can act together in solidarity"; and when, in encouraging workers to "act like a union" before they've achieved formal recognition, he suggests that "the focus should be on building an organization that can survive a contentious campaign and [remain] strong enough to force real changes in compensation, working conditions, and the quality of education for our students" (120, 121). However much all of us—graduate employee, contingent worker, full-time tenure line—may be organizing toward basic improvements in wages, benefits, and terms/conditions of employment, we are also always aiming—as Berry's title reminds us—to reclaim and enhance the whole of higher education. That project begins in our trust as fellow professionals and culminates in a renewed sense of professionalism—one that recognizes the erosion of our status equally damages students.

Here is where I might have appreciated more from the interview research. As material analysis, Berry's work makes all the right points. But for all our recent organizing successes, much militates against the kind of professional transformation conveyed by his book's title. We shouldn't—we must not—be deterred by those impediments every organizer encounters in recruiting colleagues. But academics' capacities for self-mystification remain, I would argue, the greatest barriers to the type of renewal that I, Berry, and the many figures cited in his "Acknowledgments" have been fighting for.

When I'm not teaching or organizing, I'm often training teachers. After fifteen or so years in the profession, I still feel as though we don't talk enough about our classrooms as sites of work. More importantly, we don't talk enough about *any* of our work as work. My little pyramid in west central Missouri barely rises above the prairie, but like every such enterprise,

modest to world-class, it stays alive by paying too many people too little money, and by extending them too little respect. At the first—and only!—dean’s council meeting I attended, I asked why my department’s office professionals both earned less than \$20,000. We hired a consultant, I was told, and they determined those were market wages. Sometime after that meeting, my school junked its salary schedule for professors and replaced it with “market” and “merit” indices. I was still naïve enough that I hadn’t seen that coming. Too

many of us remain naïve.

Read Joe Berry’s book for the advice it contains, the success it chronicles, the hope it conveys. But then—after or in the midst of marking, grading, prepping, teaching, meeting, conferencing, advising, researching, and writing—*then*, indulge in some truly utopian thinking. Imagine how you might convince some really intelligent people that they can be dumb about very basic things. Then organize them. Then tear down the pyramid and rebuild it.